THE CASE OF OUR FELLOW-CREATURES, THE *Oppreſſed Africans*,

RESPECTFULLY RECOMMENDED TO THE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF THE LEGISLATURE OF GREAT-BRITAIN,

By the PEOPLE called QUAKERS.

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THE CASE OF THE OPPRESSED AFRICANS.

WE are engaged, under a ſenſe of duty, to bear a publick teſtimony againſt a ſpecies of oppreſſion which, under the ſanction of national authority, has long been exerciſed upon the natives of Africa, is grown up into a ſyſtem of tyranny, and is unhappily become a conſiderable branch of the commerce of this kingdom: an oppreſſion which, in the injuſtice of its origin, and the inhumanity of its progreſs, has not, we apprehend, been exceeded, or even equalled, in the moſt barbarous ages.

We are taught, both by the holy ſcriptures, and by the experience of ages, to believe

believe that the Righteous Judge of the whole earth chaſtiſeth nations for their ſins, as well as individuals: and can it be expected that he will ſuffer this great iniquity to go unpuniſhed? As the deſign of the inſtitution of government is for a terror to evil doers, and the praiſe of them that do well, we wiſh it may be ſeriouſly conſidered, whether this has been made the rule of its adminiſtration in this land. Will it not rather be found on inquiry, that, with reſpect to the enſlaved negroes, its benevolent purpoſes have been perverted; that its terrors have fallen on the innocent, while evil doers, and oppreſſors, have been openly encouraged?

But notwithſtanding government, in former times, have been induced by what we conceive to be a miſtaken, as well as an unjuſt, policy, to promote this evil, we are perſuaded that many of the preſent members of the legiſlature, as true friends of civil and religious liberty,

berty, hold this unrighteous traffick in the utmoſt abhorrence. This perſuaſion, joined to the favourable reception of the petition of our laſt yearly-meeting to the Houſe of Commons, encourages us to addreſs you, thus freely, on this important ſubject; and we apprehend that the abolition of this iniquitous practice is not only required by the calls of juſtice and humanity, but is alſo conſiſtent with ſound policy. For avarice in this, as in other inſtances, has defeated its own purpoſe. Africa, ſo populous, and ſo rich in vegetable and mineral productions, inſtead of affording all the advantages of a well regulated commerce, is ſcarcely known but as a mart for ſlaves, and as the ſcene of violence and barbarities, perpetrated, in order to procure them, by men profeſſing the Chriſtian religion.

The arguments which have been advanced by the few writers, who have attempted to juſtify this inhuman buſi-

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neſs, can have no weight with generous minds. Thoſe, in particular, which are drawn from the permiſſion to hold ſlaves amongſt the Jews, can in no wiſe be applied to the practice amongſt us: for, bleſſed be the God and Father of all our mercies, [a] who hath made of one blood all nations of men, we now live under a diſpenſation eſſentially different from that of the law; in which many things were permitted to the Jews, becauſe of the hardneſs of their hearts. All diſtinctions of name and country, ſo far as they relate to the ſocial duties, are now aboliſhed. We are taught by our bleſſed Redeemer to look upon all men, even our enemies, as neighbours and brethren, and to do unto them as we would they ſhould do unto us.

Under a diſpenſation ſo admirably adapted to promote the temporal as well as the eternal happineſs of mankind, that

[a] Acts xvii. 26.

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any ſhould deviate ſo far from its principles, as to encourage a practice ſo replete with iniquity, and in particular that this nation, generally characterized by its attachment to civil and religious liberty, ſhould have contributed, perhaps more than any other, to the eſtabliſhment and continuance of ſlavery, is a moſt painful reflection. It would ſurely have been more conſiſtent with the avowed principles of Engliſhmen, both as men and as Chriſtians, if their ſettlement in heathen countries had been ſucceeded by mild and benevolent attempts to civilize their inhabitants, and to incline them to receive the glad tidings of the goſpel. But how different a conduct towards them has been purſued! it has not only been repugnant, in a political view, to thoſe commercial advantages which a fair and honourable treatment might have procured, but has evidently tended to increaſe the barbarity of their manners, and to excite in their minds

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an averſion to that religion, the profeſſors whereof ſo cruelly treat them.

This traffick is the principal ſource of the deſtructive wars which prevail among theſe unhappy people, and is attended with conſequences, the mere recital of which is ſhocking to humanity. The violent ſeparation of the deareſt relatives, the tears of conjugal and parental affection, the reluctance of the ſlaves to a voyage from which they can have no proſpect of returning, muſt preſent ſcenes of diſtreſs which would pierce the heart of any, in whom the principles of humanity are not wholly effaced. This, however, is but the beginning of ſorrows with the poor captives. Under their cruel treatment on ſhipboard, where, without regard to health or decency, hundreds are confined within the narrow limits of the hold, numbers periſh; and, by what is called the ſeaſoning in the Iſlands, many are relieved by a premature death, from that ſe-

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ries of accumulated ſufferings which awaits their leſs happy ſurvivors. The meaſure of their afflictions yet remains to be filled; being ſold to the higheſt bidder, and branded with a hot iron, they have yet to linger on, unpitied, the whole term of their miſerable exiſtence, in exceſſive labour, and too often under the mercileſs controul of unprincipled and unfeeling men, without proper food or clothing, or any encouragement to ſweeten their toil; whilſt every fault, real, or imaginary, is puniſhed with a rigour which is but weakly reſtrained by the colony laws: inſtances of the greateſt enormity, even the moſt wanton or deliberate murder of the ſlaves, being only puniſhed, if puniſhed at all, by trifling pecuniary fines.

But a bare enumeration of the calamities of this wretched people, would exceed the limits propoſed to this ſhort addreſs: we think it not improper, however, to give the following extract from a late

a late author, who was an eye-witneſs of the miſeries of this perſecuted race.

'If we bring this matter home, and, as Job propoſed to his friends, "put "our ſoul in their ſouls ſtead;" if we conſider ourſelves, and our children, as expoſed to the hardſhips which theſe people lie under, in ſupporting an imaginary greatneſs;'

'Did we, in ſuch caſe, behold an increaſe of luxury and ſuperfluity among our oppreſſors, and therewith feel an increaſe of the weight of our burdens, and expect our poſterity to groan under oppreſſion after us;'

'Under all this miſery, had we none to plead our cauſe, nor any hope of relief from man, how would our cries aſcend to the God of the ſpirits of all fleſh, who judgeth the world in righteouſneſs, and, in his own time, is a refuge for the oppreſſed!'

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'When we were hunger-bitten, and could not have ſufficient nouriſhment, but ſaw them in fulneſs, pleaſing their taſte with things fetched from far;'

'When we were wearied with labour, denied the liberty to reſt, and ſaw them ſpending their time at eaſe; when garments, anſwerable to our neceſſities, were denied us, while we ſaw them clothed in that which was coſtly and delicate;'

'Under ſuch affliction, how would theſe painful feelings riſe up as witneſſes againſt their pretended devotion! And if the name of their religion were mentioned in our hearing, how would it ſound in our ears, like a word which ſignified ſelf-exaltation and hardneſs of heart!'

'When a trade is carried on productive of much miſery, and they who ſuffer by it are ſome thouſand miles

miles off, the danger is the greater of not laying their ſufferings to heart.'

'In procuring ſlaves from the coaſt of Africa, many children are ſtolen privately; wars alſo are encouraged among the negroes: but all is at a great diſtance. Many groans ariſe from dying men, which we hear not. Many cries are uttered by widows and fatherleſs children, which reach not our ears. Many cheeks are wet with tears, and faces ſad with unutterable grief, which we ſee not. Cruel tyranny is encouraged. The hands of robbers are ſtrengthened; and thouſands reduced to the moſt abject ſlavery, who never injured us.'

'Were we, for the term of one year only, to be eye-witneſſes to what paſſeth in getting theſe ſlaves; were the blood which is there ſhed, to be ſprinkled on our garments; were the poor captives, bound with thongs, heavy laden with elephants

elephants teeth, to paſs before our eyes, in their way to the ſea;'

'Were their bitter lamentations, day after day, to ring in our ears, and their mournful cries in the night, to hinder us from ſleeping;'

'Were we to hear the ſound of the tumult, when the ſlaves on board the ſhips attempt to kill the Engliſh, and behold the iſſue of thoſe bloody conflicts; what pious man could be a witneſs to theſe things, and ſee a trade carried on in this manner, without being deeply affected with ſorrow?'——

Our religious ſociety in theſe kingdoms, and in North America, have for many years tenderly ſympathized with this unhappy people, under their complicated ſufferings, and have endeavoured to procure them relief: nor has their cauſe been without other advocates; whoſe numbers we have with much ſatisfaction

tisfaction obſerved to increaſe. The expectation of many, who are anxiouſly concerned for the ſuppreſſion of this national evil, is now, under Providence, fixed upon the wiſe and humane interpoſition of the legiſlature; to whom, with dutiful ſubmiſſion, we earneſtly recommend the ſerious conſideration of this important ſubject; with a pleaſing hope, that the reſult will be, a prohibition of this traffick in future, and an extenſion of ſuch relief to thoſe who already groan in bondage, as juſtice and mercy may dictate, and their particular ſituations may admit. That ſo the bleſſings of thoſe who are ready to periſh may reſt upon you, and this nation may no longer, on their account, remain obnoxious to the righteous judgments of the Lord, who, in the moſt awful manner, declared by his prophets, that the land ſhould tremble, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein, for the iniquity of thoſe who oppreſs the poor, and cruſh the needy; and who likewiſe pronounced

nounced a " woe [d] unto him, that " buildeth his houſe by unrighteouſ- " neſs, and his chambers by wrong; " that uſeth his neighbour's ſervice " without wages, and giveth him not " for his work."

Signed by order of the meeting for ſufferings,* London, the 28th day of the eleventh month, 1783, by

JOHN ADY,

Clerk to the meeting.

[d] Jeremiah xxii. 13.

* This meeting is compoſed of about one hundred members of the ſociety reſiding in London, who are choſen by, and correſpond with, the meetings in the country. It was inſtituted, and thus named, during the times of perſecution, (anno 1675) in order to receive accounts of the ſufferings of our members, and to ſolicit relief from thoſe in power. It ſtill continues to ſuperintend the general concerns of the ſociety during the intervals of the yearly-meeting.

FINIS.

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